

Point Comfort talks set on Formosa plant leak

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Formosa Plastics' response to a hydrochloric acid leak at their Point Comfort plant Sunday will be discussed at a Point Comfort City Council meeting set for 7 p.m. Tuesday at city hall.

"Point Comfort is irate," said Sue Traylor, whose ranch borders the Formosa plant. "I've had more than two dozen phone calls today."

There were no reported injuries but at least six families temporarily evacuated their homes.

Mrs. Traylor said her husband, D.L. "Dick" Traylor, will bring a video tape he made that shows the cloud of hydrochloric acid crossing their property soon after the release.

The release drifted from the plant in a northwesterly direction, away from Point Comfort.

Formosa officials said Monday that they asked for the meeting before the Point Comfort City Council after meeting earlier in the day with County Judge Howard G. Hartzog, Point Comfort Mayor Theresa Tanner and Calhoun County Emergency Management Coordinator Billy Zwerschke.

Randy Smith, Formosa's plant manager, said company officials learned from Sunday's release some procedures that the company

might implement within the plant to more fully protect area residents.

A task force will be appointed in cooperation with the county judge and mayor to discuss and recommend a plan to notify residents in the event of an emergency, he said.

Further, the task force will establish an ongoing education program to alert citizens what to do in the event of an emergency.

Smith said Formosa's release of hydrochloric acid at 7:25 p.m. combined with humidity in the air and formed a vaporous cloud that passed over the company's 1,800-acre expansion site towards a sparsely-settled agriculture area with no more than five homes in it.

Residents within the path of the release were phoned by the Formosa Plastics Security Department within five minutes of the release, he said.

The Calhoun County Emergency Management team also phoned those residents and the city of Point Comfort followed the phone calls with personal visits to the homes by city police and fireman, he said.

"That's a lie," Mrs. Traylor said late Monday. "We didn't hear from a Formosa official until today."

Formosa did not phone nearby residents as they have promised to

do in the past, nor was the county's emergency alert network activated, Mrs. Traylor said.

"If it had not been for our daughter, Tina, we would not have known," Mrs. Traylor said. "She phoned her daddy about 7:30 p.m. to report that she could see a dark cloud from Formosa Plastics drifting our way."

Mrs. Traylor said that when she phoned the Point Comfort Police Department about 7:45 p.m. they did not yet know about the release.

She also phoned the home of Point Comfort Mayor Theresa Tanner while her husband grabbed a video camera to record the toxic cloud's track across their ranch, she said.

By 7:50 or 7:55 p.m., she said, they and their grandchildren were on their way to Memorial Medical Center in Port Lavaca.

At 8:10 p.m. — nearly an hour after the release — Calhoun County Emergency Management Coordinator left a message on their answering machine that they should evacuate, Mrs. Traylor said.

The Point Comfort fire department did check their home but it was after they had evacuated, Mrs. Traylor said, adding that the fire department learned of the release from the police department, not from Formosa Plastics.

"We've always been told that we'd be the second to be notified only after the city of Point Comfort," Mrs. Traylor said, "but nobody phoned us until after we were already gone."

As they observed the toxic cloud they encountered a strange taste in their mouth and a burning sensation in their eyes, she said.

By the time they arrived at the hospital, the burning sensation in their eyes had lessened and their family physician persuaded them that tests were not necessary for them or their grandchildren, she said.

They were stunned to discover at the hospital that officials there had not been notified about the release, Mrs. Traylor said.

Formosa officials said Monday